

“Untoppied” Historic Tipple

BY LUKE M. SNELL AND BILLIE G. SNELL

As you enter Muddy, IL, your attention will be drawn to a sign announcing one of the small town’s historical attractions (Fig. 1). The sign proclaims that Muddy has “The only mine tipple built of solid concrete existing anywhere in the world.” This might be a stretch. Nonetheless, the structure is called the O’Gara (later the Sahara) #12 Muddy Mine Tipple, and the claim is also made by the townsfolk that the tipple is the first of its type built with reinforced concrete. There have since been many concrete tipples and most modern varieties are of reinforced concrete construction.

What is a tipple? A tipple, like the historic one described here, is a structure—or its location—at a mine where coal cars from the mine are upended physically—tipped as it were—and emptied of their contents. The coal can then be unloaded into a storage area, or directly into a loading chute. In earlier times, the tall tipple was the prominent structure at the surface of an underground mine. A large edifice, it housed a rotary dumper for emptying the loaded cars bringing mined coal and waste rock excavated underground.

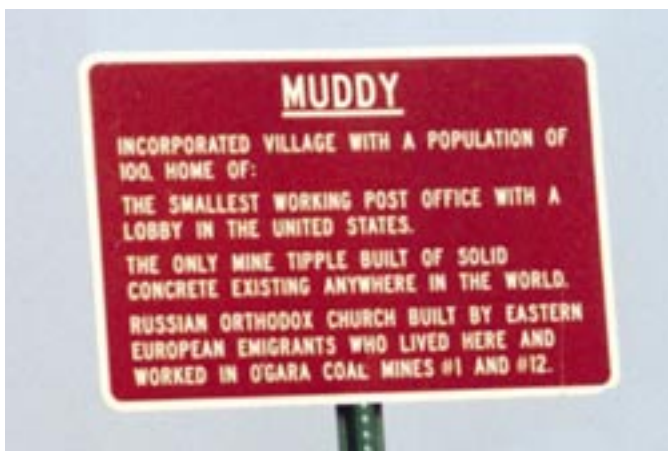


Fig. 1: The historical, reinforced concrete structure is a source of local pride



Fig. 2: The Muddy, IL, tippel at work in the 1920s



Fig. 3: After more than 80 years, the structure is still in excellent condition, having resisted decades of freezing and thawing

Conjecture in Muddy, IL, is that its tippel's back legs are set on an angle to function as a ground-mounted hoist, aiding also in raising the loaded cars up from the mine and lowering the empties. Once hoisted and tipped out, a car's pieces of excavated material were dumped into conveyors and carried on to screens for sorting according to size and quality—waste rock being removed at the same time. Also, a tippel served as a storage facility before the coal was transferred to another type of conveyance, such as truck or rail car (Fig. 2).

What makes Muddy's tippel so unique as a historical concrete structure is that before its time most tippels were constructed of wood, brick, or even concrete block, but not cast-in-place concrete. Such a structure was even unusual as late as the 1930s, yet the Muddy tippel was built in 1923 by the now defunct Allen and Garcia Co. for the O'Gara Coal Co. It closed operation in 1930 as the Great Depression of the time deepened.

Though much more information about this historical tippel has been lost, it still remains as a magnificent and unusual cast-in-place edifice that today is still in near perfect condition (Fig. 3).

Selected for reader interest by the editors.



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